



Fact Sheet

California Environmental Protection Agency

 **Air Resources Board**

Backyard Household Waste Burning

What you don't know can hurt you

Some people still have 55-gallon metal drums in their yards that they use to burn household garbage and rubbish. It's important to know that burning these materials can release some very unhealthy air pollutants that can affect you, your family, and your community. Below are some facts about the public health problem posed by burning these wastes at home.

- Use of burn barrels is a public health concern. Household waste burned in these barrels produces toxic pollutants that can linger in the environment and our bodies for a long time. These toxic pollutants may cause cancer, immune system damage, and other health problems.
- The cancer causing pollutants produced during burning include dioxins. Infants and young children may be especially vulnerable to dioxin exposure according to the State Office of Environmental Health and Hazard Assessment. The smoke produced by burning waste in burn barrels may also cause other health effects, such as triggering asthma attacks.
- Avoiding the plume of smoke is not sufficient to eliminate the potential health risks. These toxic pollutants can travel long distances, and can deposit on soil, plants, and in water. The ash from the barrel also contains these pollutants, which can be released into the soil and water. Animals and fish can ingest the pollutants, plants can absorb them, and they can be passed on to people when contaminated food is eaten.
- In the year 2002, about 800,000 households throughout the State were allowed to burn some form of household waste in burn barrels. This burning is one of the largest sources of dioxins in California. While other dioxin sources such as municipal and medical waste incinerators have strict pollution control devices, household waste burning does not.
- To address this public health concern, a new rule restricting the burning of household waste will take effect January 1, 2004.

If you have special accommodation or language needs, please contact the Air Resources Board Coordinator at (916) 323-4916. TTY/TDD/Speech-to-Speech users may dial 7-1-1 for the California Relay Service.

The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption. For a list of simple ways you can reduce demand and cut your energy costs, see our Website: <http://www.arb.ca.gov>.

What am I Allowed to Burn?

- Burning household waste outdoors, including paper and cardboard, and the use of burn barrels for residential burning will be prohibited statewide beginning January 1, 2004, under a new statewide regulation.
- Under the new regulation, burning dry vegetation waste in piles at a residence will still be allowed, unless prohibited by local rules and ordinances. Check with your local air district for any additional restrictions.

Are there any Exemptions?

- Exemptions *may* be allowed to burn paper and cardboard, and to use burn barrels in areas of very low population density in some of the more rural areas of the State, in recognition of the limited availability of waste services. No exemptions are allowed for the burning of plastics and household garbage. Check with your local air district to determine whether you live in an exemption area.

What are my Alternatives to Burning?

- Household garbage and rubbish will need to be disposed of through curbside pickup or self-hauling to a transfer station, landfill, or recycling center.
- There are several ways to reduce the volume of waste materials we generate and therefore have to dispose of. These include buying products with less packaging, reusing materials, and recycling. In addition, household waste can be compacted and organic and paper waste can be composted.
- Although many local ordinances continue to allow natural vegetation to be burned in piles, non-burning alternatives should be considered where possible to minimize neighborhood smoke impacts. These alternatives include composting and chipping vegetation.

Additional Information Sources

ARB Residential Burning Web Page:
<http://www.arb.ca.gov/smp/resburn/resburn.htm>

Integrated Waste Management Board Web Page:
<http://www.ciwmb.ca.gov/PublicEd/>

ARB Public Information Office: (916) 322-2990